Frontlines

Lavender Festival Brings the World to Us

By Alma Cremonesi

The Third Annual Pikes Peak Lavender Film Festival, September 5 to 8, offers an incredible program of films from around the world. You don't have to leave Colorado to experience world cultures and history in this fabulous program.

Because the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center was only available during Rosh Hashanah weekend, the Festival expanded to Thursday for opening night. Following a party at the Fine Arts Center the Lavender Festival opens with the United States premiere of *Friends and Family,* a hilarious farce about the intermarriage of two people from mafia and right-wing militia families.

Lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgendered people deal with complexities of families in three other festival films this year. Characters create their own families, confront their real families, and rise above their backgrounds. In the Japanese comedy *Hush!* directed by acclaimed Hashiguch (*A Touch of Fever, Like Grains of Sand*) we find the family we choose to be more gratifying than the families we're born into.

There's no escaping real family in the romantic comedy, *A Family Affair.* When Rachel, played by writer-director Helen Lesnick, flees New York after a traumatic break-up, she's greeted in California by a P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays) mom, who takes her daughter's sexual identity as a post-retirement career. This romantic comedy offers a loving twist on PFLAG moms and the search for Ms. Right.

British film, *A.K.A*, based on a true story, reveals an England riveted by class conflicts and greed. It tells the fascinating story of young man, whose mother is a waitress to the wealthy, determined to rise above his background and become part of the class his mother serves.

Both Friday and Saturday begin with sobering World War II stories. Friday's German language film, *The Journey to Kafiristan,* takes us to the breathlessly vast landscapes of Afghanistan with two German women escaping Fascism, which is sweeping across the continent. On Saturday morning, the festival presents *Markova: Comfort Gay*, from the Philippines. This heartwarming drama describes the wonder and horror of Philippine female-impersonating dancers at the hands of their Japanese invaders.

Up until this year most lesbian directors have not hired lesbian actresses. That changes this year with the pioneering *By Hook and By Crook* (USA) and *Guardian of the Frontier* (Slovenia). Both films portray women in unconventional roles necessitated by the desire to survive. If you crave bold and original films, these sometimes shocking always thought-provoking entries will provide you with memorable entertainment.

In cinema there's often a lag between the social conditions of an era and stories that arrive on film. The intensity of life with AIDS is portrayed in two beautifully written films that evoke our conscience and recall our experiences in a heartfelt way. From Italy comes the controversial *Days (Giorni)*, written and directed by women about a love-triangle.

From Los Angeles, *The Trip* takes us through the ups and downs of a long-term romance while chronicling the evolution of the gay community from the dawn of gay liberation to the birth of AIDS activism.. The characters move from the closet to the streets and from self-repression to self-respect. Both *Days* and *The Trip* offer a lovingly crafted window of insight into an era with actors we'll recognize such as Larry Sullivan from *Will and Grace* and Jill St. John, who returns to the screen for the first time in a decade.

By Hook or By Crook portrays women in unconventional relationships.

Because the festival falls on Rosh Hashanah this year, festival producers decided to begin Sunday with a moving documentary, *Trembling Before G_d*, which describes the experience of being gay or lesbian in Orthodox Jewish families.

For the first time this year the Lavender Festival invited filmmakers to join the festival in Filmmakers Forum. Steak House, the producer of *By Hook and By Crook*, and Q. Allan Brocka, creator of the *Rick and Steve Series*, will be joining our audience for a discussion of their films.

Another Lavender Festival coup is the very first lesbian film to come out of China. Shot underground, *Fish and Elephant* reflects the pulse of lesbian life in Beijing. Romance develops between two women in this traditional society and the challenges of their relationship evolve into a fascinating story.

With African drums beating and exquisite dancing, the festival closes on an energetic note with Sengelese-French collaboration in *Karmen Gei.* This bisexual reinterpretation of Bizet's Carmen with an all African cast portrays the main character as a vibrant, compassionate woman in full control of her powerful sexuality.

The Third Annual Pikes Peaks Lavender Film Festival has outdone itself this year with excellent films in every time slot. The festival offers a pass, which includes 13 features, 16 shorts, The Filmmaker's Forum, and two parties—all for $75 ($60 for seniors, students and low income). Passes are available online at www.pplff.org, by calling 38-MOVIE or sending a check to PPLFF, P.O. Box 1987, Colorado Springs, 80901. Day passes and individual movie tickets are available from the Fine Arts Center after August 19.